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## Guthrie hears about immigration



By Lisa King

The economy and health care remain hot topics, but No. 1 subject on the minds of those who attended a town hall meeting with U.S. Rep. Brett Guthrie (R-Bowling Green) on Thursday afternoon was immigration.

Guthrie, up for re-election in District 2, fielded questions from the public during a roughly 90-minute session at the Stratton Center in Shelbyville on Thursday afternoon, the seventh in a series of meetings he calls “America Speaking Out.”

In his short greeting to the crowd, which included people from Lexington, Frankfort, Louisville and Bullitt County as well as Shelby County, Guthrie said that, generally, people have expressed concern in four major areas.

“The big issues that people have been asking about are the economy, taxes, debt and spending and health-care reform,” he said.

And he offered a brief overview of his thoughts on those topics before the questions began in a session that was scheduled for an hour but ran about 25 minutes longer:

He supports the Workforce Investment Act and added that he hopes people don’t just end up finding a different job, but a better job. “We have to re-create our entrepreneurial spirit,” he said. “People are afraid to try to start a business today, and we have to change that.”

Taxes will be a major topic when the session convenes in September, and he agreed that government spending has gotten out of hand. “When you get out of sorts with the fundamentals, things get out of balance,” he said.

On health-care reform, he said, “This bill can’t be fixed. It’s got to be completely changed. It does not address health-care costs.”

When he opened the floor, the primary concern of those who asked questions dealt primarily with immigration reform.

There certainly were those who discussed the state of the economy, one mentioned education, a man was upset because he couldn’t get the proper permits to keep his business open, and one question dealt with the lack of funding for ambulance services.

But, in a county where migrant labor and residency issues are primary topics of public discussion, three people – two educators and a priest – in the room of about 50 rose to speak about immigration and profess their support for the DREAM ACT.

The Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act was proposed in the Senate and the House of Representatives on March 26, 2009, and would pertain to illegal immigrants who

were brought to this country by their parents as minors.

The legislation would give them an avenue to earn conditional permanent residency, if they were to graduate from high school and go on to higher education or if they were to enter the United States military.

Rev. Pat Delahay, associate director of the Catholic Conference of Kentucky, located in Frankfort, told Guthrie that these children couldn't help being brought into the country.

"I want to echo what Erin Howard [educator from Lexington] said that these young people should be given an opportunity for a better life," he said. "We don't want them to be left out in the cold."

Guthrie said the idea behind the bill is that once the children have been educated, there's no desire to send them back to their homeland.

"We want to keep educated, trained people here in the U.S.," he said. "Besides, what would they do if they went back to Mexico, a place they don't remember and doesn't even exist for them except in the minds of their parents?"

Guthrie said he wanted to emphasize that even though he agreed with Howard and Delahay, he thought the issue of the DREAM Act was secondary in the overall immigrant issue.

"The issue of securing the border must come first," he said. "We have to have a secure border before we can address anything else in immigration reform."

John Hultgren of Louisville, assistant director of the Kentucky Ambulance Association, told Guthrie he was concerned about the lack of funding for EMS organizations throughout the state.

"I want to point out that all this money from federal grants is not going into ambulance programs," he said. "A lot of ambulance services are not making enough money and they are in serious danger of shutting down."

Dave Gove of Shelbyville voiced a two-fold concern about the economy and government spending.

"We need to get businesses moving again, so they will have the means to create jobs," he said.

"We need the federal government to stop spending. Do you have any specific ideas about where spending can be reduced and cuts made?" he asked Guthrie pointedly.

Guthrie's reply was just as direct.

"I think we have to put a freeze on federal pay raises," he said.

He added that in addition to making cuts and enacting freezes, he thought government should also make sure that certain programs – like social security – should be given priority.

"We need to honor that commitment to them [seniors]," he said.

Guthrie told the crowd he would take the concerns they voiced with him in September.

"This is what this is all about," he said, his gesture taking in the entire crowd, "to solicit ideas from the people on what we should be thinking about in Washington."

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